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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 005996

SIPDIS

PLEASE PASS TO APRIL PALMERLEE, G/IWI

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TAGS: PHUM PGOV JO

SUBJECT: SPECIAL COORDINATOR FOR WOMEN'S ISSUES VISITS  
JORDAN

REF: A. AMMAN 05908

B. AMMAN 05922

Classified By: DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION GREGORY L. BERRY: 1.5 (b) and (d)  
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1. (C) SUMMARY. April Palmerlee, Special Coordination for International Women's Issues, visited Jordan Oct 5-8 for the recent NEA Economic Officers Conference. During her visit, Palmerlee made a site visit to a social services center in Zarqa and met with a GOJ human rights official and a local human rights activist. END SUMMARY

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FAMILY GUIDANCE AND AWARENESS CENTER  
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2. (U) On October 7, Palmerlee and poloff visited the Family Guidance and Awareness Center in Zarqa. Director Nadia Bushnaq, a long-time embassy contact, gave Palmerlee a tour of the facilities. Bushnaq has 25 years experience as a social worker in Jordan and opened the Center in Zarqa four years ago (note: Bushnaq also ran for parliament in 1993, but was unsuccessful). The Center provides a range of services (mostly to women), such as guidance on how to cope with spousal abuse and raising children in poverty. She has psychologists and legal counsel on site and operates a hotline. Bushnaq has a total of 40 employees, half of whom are "field workers" performing outreach services throughout Jordan. An AID funded family planning physician regularly meets women at the Center. The Center currently receives funding from the EU, the UN, the GOJ, several European governments and the Canadian government. Most recently, the GOJ gave the Center a 40,000 USD grant to purchase a building for internet classes, meetings, and other activities, such as sewing and preparing foodstuffs. Bushnaq's latest planned projects include a children's center in Zarqa and a women's shelter. She has received considerable media coverage for her efforts, including a recent 40 minute interview on JTV.

3. (U) Palmerlee met with several women at the Center, most of whom were victims of spousal abuse and/or living in poverty. Many of these women credited Bushnaq with helping them to get back on their feet. One woman told of how her husband abandoned her and left her to raise four children, all of whom were able to complete college and become successful people. "I could not have done this without Nadia's help," she said.

4. (U) The Center is currently developing its internet classroom. Bushnaq said that the GOJ and several local companies have contracts with the Center to provide internet instruction. The Center also provides poor women (and men) with the opportunity to take classes for a small fee (which can be waived for needy students). The Center also teaches women how to sew and produce foodstuffs, and their products are marketed and sold by the center. Bushnaq says that teaching abused or neglected women marketable skills raises their self esteem and ultimately empowers them.

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PALMERLEE MEETS WITH NANCY BAKIR,  
HUMAN RIGHTS ADVISOR TO THE PRIME MINISTRY  
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5. (C) Palmerlee had lunch with Nancy Bakir, Human Rights Advisor to the Prime Ministry. Bakir has been working for the GOJ in various capacities for more than 20 years. Currently, she is organizing the forthcoming first ladies' conference in Amman, which will be held in early November and will include approximately ten first ladies from the region. Palmerlee discussed the issue of honor killings with Bakir (reftel a). Bakir agreed with Palmerlee that honor killings are a serious matter but noted that societal attitudes are improving and that the Jordanian media now regularly report on honor killings. The two agreed that more effort needs to be made to empower women in the political and business arenas.

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SA'EDA KILANI, HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST, COMMENTS  
ON MALE ATTITUDES TOWARDS WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE EAST  
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16. (C) Palmerlee also met with Sa'eda Kilani, a local human rights advocate. Kilani is currently working on a book that analyzes the phenomenon of the Egyptian soap opera hero portrayed in "Haj al Mutamudawally". Mutamudawally, Kilani explains, has become an icon for Arab men throughout the region. He is the prototype "magnanimous polygamist," able to attract women from every social class and background -- at all times above criticism for his behavior. Kilani notes that men in the region look up to him and that this, in her view, is instructive on the general attitude that men in the region have toward women. "He is who they want to be," Kilani said, although she conceded that in Jordan only 8 percent of men are polygamists.

17. (C) On human rights generally, Kilani commented that, "although we have a constitution here it is qualified significantly, and there is no 'ground floor' of human rights," such as provided by the US Constitution to Americans. That said, Kilani believes the GOJ is generally interested in the advancement of women's issues and rights in Jordan. With regard to honor killings (reftel a), Kilani said that people had become confused between laws with regard to honor killings and "crimes of passion," and that, in her opinion, the GOJ should do more to clarify the differences. Kilani said that the fact that some Jordanian women live in fear of being killed by their husband or close family member is tragic, and noted efforts of Royal Family members (in particular Prince Ali) to address the issue. "The Royal Court, in general, is quite supportive of women's rights," Kilani said

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COMMENT  
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18. (C) Bushnaq's center is one of the most successful social services center in Jordan and has received funding from many international sources, including the USG. On women's issues in general, we note the Queen's meeting with DAS Elizabeth Cheney (reftel b) as well as the GOJ's recent pledge to move forward on a legal framework through which honor crimes can be better addressed (reftel a).  
GNEHM